

Keynote Speech Community-based Education and Learning

by Lyn Tett

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This talk addresses a series of questions about the contribution that community-based education and learning can make to adults' lifelong learning. The overarching and most important question is can community education and learning contribute to a more equal society? The answers to this are explored through a series of examples of projects that have challenged the status quo and contributed to the building of knowledge and understanding of adults.

I begin by asking 'what is meant by the term 'community'?' in order to explore how different conceptualisations impact on practice in community based education. I then move on to discuss how individuals and groups might be engaged and supported in pursuing their goals. What 'spaces' are there that can be explored and expanded in policy and practice? I will draw on examples from a family literacy project, a project focused on improving community health, and a project that is aimed at engaging disaffected young adults. These examples will also explore different models of learning and development and show the role that universities play as sources of knowledge and understanding.

Of course in order to be effective we need to work in partnership with others so my next question is what makes for effective partnerships between universities, practitioners and participants and how can we build community capacity together? What implication does this have for more democratic ways of working? These questions are explored through an example of anti-racist work.

Finally I ask what do these ways of working mean for the professional development of community educators within universities? What role do we play in developing a profession that is committed to democracy and equality?

I conclude by suggesting that although there are no easy answers to these difficult questions having a vision before us of what might be possible helps us to work towards a more equal and democratic society.

